

# Valley Courier

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### Power companies seek input

Posted: Wednesday, Aug 5th, 2009

Transmission routes pending

By RUTH HEIDE

SAN LUIS VALLEY — Tri-State and Xcel Energy want to give power to the people.

While making plans to build a new transmission line into the San Luis Valley, the project partners are scheduling public meetings and taking public comments to give people a voice in the route the transmission line will ultimately follow.

In addition to meetings on the eastern side of La Veta Pass (where the transmission line will cross over), Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Inc. and Public Service Company of Colorado, an Xcel Energy company, plan two meetings this month in the San Luis Valley:

- 4-7 p.m. Monday, Aug. 17, at the Fort Garland/Blanca Community Center
- 4-7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 18, at the Alamosa Recreation Center

These meetings will not consist of presentations but will allow area residents to come and go through an open-house style format. Residents will be able to see large blow-ups of the 4-6 proposed transmission route corridor alternatives and speak with representatives of Tri-State, Xcel, the SLV Rural Electric Cooperative and other groups with interest in the project. In addition, information will be available on areas of concern such as water usage, types of electric poles that will be used and EMF (electric/magnetic force.)

Folks may leave comments at the meetings or comment by phone, 1-877-482-7881, or electronically at [www.socotransmission.com](http://www.socotransmission.com)

The deadline for comments is September 21.

"The main purpose of these scoping meetings is to help determine the route," said Jim Clare, SLV Rural Electric Cooperative (REC.)

SLV REC CEO John Villyard said as a result of the public comment, the routes will be narrowed down.

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## B-034-001: Comment Noted (In Review)

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The Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be completed in late 2010 and will be available at <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.

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"This is the opportunity to get questions answered," said Tri-State Public Affairs Manager Brad Jones. He said another round of public comments will occur about this time next year in relationship to an environmental assessment that is required because the project involves federal funding.

Data completion is expected to conclude by 2013 when construction might begin on the new transmission line.

The 230-kilovolt line will run about 150 miles from the SLV Substation near Mosca to the Comanche Substation near Pueblo. The entire project is estimated to cost about \$180 million.

Villyard said REC's project with Tri-State was initially designed to address growth in agriculture that represents a large share of REC's customer base.

Clare added that agriculture requires energy 24/7, so an outage could translate to lost crops and revenue. Losses to agriculture affect everyone, he added.

"The main purpose of our line has always been reliability, capacity and safety," he said. "We are going to try to get that message across. Xcel will try to get their message across, and really the two are the same at many points."

Xcel has joined Tri-State in this project in part to comply with new renewable energy legislation. The Valley has been designated one of the literal hot spots for solar renewable energy, but transportation of that energy out of the Valley is currently constrained by existing transmission lines.

"The transmission in the area has already reached its capacity," Jones explained. "You need to enhance/build transmission infrastructure in order to export that power out of the Valley."

He said currently the only transmission lines into the Valley come over Poncha Pass.

"We have had concerns with voltage support for quite awhile," Clare said. He added that the drought year 2002 stretched the power system to the limit with every well pumping water to the drought-stricken farms and ranches.

Villyard added concerns about only one route providing power to the Valley. He said something like a forest fire on Poncha could cut off power to the Valley.

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